

NH Board of Nursing

Position Statement and Clinical Practice Advisories Regarding the Role of the RN First Assistant (RNFA)

The RNFA is a licensed RN who has acquired the necessary qualifications including the knowledge, skills and judgments to serve in this capacity. The RNFA practices in collaboration with, and as directed by, the surgeon during the intraoperative phase or the perioperative experience.

The decision by an RN to practice as an RNFA must be voluntary and deliberated with an understanding of the professional accountability the role entails. The intraoperative nursing behaviors of the RNFA may include:

- handling and cutting tissue
- providing surgical site exposure
- suturing
- wound management
- providing hemostasis

It is important to note that an RNFA should not concurrently function as a scrub or circulating nurse.

What are the qualifications of the RN First Assistant?

- Current licensure as a registered nurse in New Hampshire
- Successful completion of a post-basic nursing education program the intent of which is the preparation of registered nurses to practice as first assistants during surgery
- Documentation of proficiency in perioperative nursing practice as both a scrub and circulating nurse
- Ability to apply principles of asepsis and infection control
- Knowledge of surgical anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, and operative technique related to the operative procedures in which the RN assists
- Ability to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- Ability to perform effectively in stressful and emergency situations
- Ability to recognize safety hazards and initiate appropriate preventive and corrective action
- Ability to perform effectively as a member of the operative team

How does an RN become a First Assist?

There are educational programs to prepare experienced RNs who have achieved proficiency in perioperative nursing. Formal RNFA education is provided in many colleges throughout the country and involves the equivalent of one academic year of both classroom and supervised clinical education with oversight by a surgeon preceptor. For additional information regarding this nursing specialty, contact AORN at (800) 755-2676 or visit

[www.AORN.org/Clinical_Practice/RNFA_Resources/First_Assisting_\(RNFA\).aspx](http://www.AORN.org/Clinical_Practice/RNFA_Resources/First_Assisting_(RNFA).aspx)

Is additional credentialing or licensure required in New Hampshire?

No. The RNFA scope of practice is a further refinement of perioperative nursing practice and is included within the nursing practice governed by the RN licensure. Prior to the nurse functioning in the RNFA

role, additional credentialing establishing the RN's qualifications, competency, and proficiency should be completed by the institution or agency granting clinical privileges.

I am a nationally certified FNP (APRN in NH). What further qualifications do I need to work as RNFA?

The APRN should function as described in the *AORN Position Statement on Advanced Practice Registered Nurses in the Perioperative Environment* (2014). Additional education should meet the requirements outlined in *AORN Standards for RN First Assistant Education Programs* (2013).

As of January 1, 2016, an APRN must complete a program that covers the content of the *AORN Standards for RN First Assistant Education Programs* (which may be a portion of graduate or post graduate or stand-alone program).

An APRN must also meet the standards set forth the requirements of the Board, as noted on the Board web site, to practice as RNFA.

RNFA practice is under the RN license and would not count as practice hours for renewal of advanced practice license.

Is it within the scope of practice of the RNFA to suture an operative site if the surgeon is no longer in the operating room?

Yes, it is within the scope of practice as long as the surgeon is immediately available.

Is it within the RNFA's scope of practice, under the direct supervision of the surgeon, to place a laparoscopic trocar in the surgical patient?

The board advised that it is not within the scope of practice for an RNFA to place a laparoscopic trocar in the surgical patient.

Can the RNFA suture over a vessel using the robotic surgical program?

No. The RNFA practice of suturing over vessels using person-to-person direct methods is within the scope of practices of the competent RNFA.

Can the RNFA certified by Guidant perform radial artery harvesting?

No. The RNFA may, after education and verification of competency, perform extremity **vein** harvesting under the direct supervision of the operating physician.